



National Care Leavers' Week 2009

STAND AND DELIVER!

Rich Rollinson, chair of the Care Leavers' Foundation, looks at the similarities between the season of autumn and leaving care

I have found myself reflecting in recent weeks on what I haven't been noticing – the turning of autumn leaves, the shortening of the days. And those reflections gave me pause to consider more thoughtfully this year's National Care Leavers' Week. There is still much to do. There are still many difficulties facing care leavers, 'new' and 'old'.

And those persistent difficulties could easily absorb our full attention for this week and for many weeks beyond. While we shall still have to name, and seek to help resolve, the continuing gaps and letdowns across the 'after care' systems, we can at least spend some time in anticipation of and during this week appreciating the positives and achievements of individuals, groups and organisations involved in this important task.

CLAIMING THAT EXTRA HOUR

So in this appreciative frame of noticing small things, one of the first things I noticed is that Care Leavers' Week itself has become for many a valued and widely anticipated annual event, with its focus on making visible care leavers, their needs, their strengths and potential, as well as the responsibilities of the 'corporate parent' for this population well beyond the period of their 'in care careers'. I realised for the first time that Care Leavers' Week always falls in the calendar week when the clocks go back. Our week has an extra hour. Apart from that genuinely nice Sunday morning feel of being able to roll over in bed and reclaim that hour lost in March, that extra hour may be most important as a symbol. Among a population that so often has had to accept that less will have to be more in terms

of support and attention, the one week in an entire year formally dedicated to their high-profile recognition has both the longest day and is the longest week of the year. So let's doubly appreciate that extra hour at the start of our week this year and every year.

A TIME FOR REFLECTION

Autumn traditionally has been regarded as a period of transition and reflection. It is in itself a stage in the unfolding of a year – a through route first to the end of our annual cycle and then on to new beginnings. In the same way, leaving care marks the end of one phase and an entry point to new beginnings. Care leaving encapsulates ending, transition and renewal. Autumn provides an appreciative perspective – a seasonal window back to what has been realised and forward to what we may expect in the coming year. National Care Leavers' Week offers us this same annual perspective.

Autumn is the season of maturity and the harvesting of produce, not just a season marking the onset of decay. So too in our week, alongside our recognition of the undeniable losses experienced or feared by care leavers, we shall be wise to reflect on the maturation that many have achieved, which, with some judicious continuing support, will itself prove to be the key resource available to them as they proceed through their next stage of living.

Finally, we continue to provide an annual occasion that will reliably celebrate care leavers' achievements and highlight their needs. We offer a containing 'mind' around them in which they will feel supported as they face the challenges of life in the world after care. Enjoy autumn; enjoy Care Leavers' Week.



Care leavers face many challenges in setting up home and living independently for the first time

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

National Care Leavers' Week 2009 recognises that, for better or worse, and we hope in part influenced by the efforts of all those involved in Care Leavers' Week over the past seven years, we now have the best that we are going to get for a generation in terms of legislation to improve the lot of children leaving our public care system.

The ball is now firmly in the court of local authorities and local services to deliver the best they can within the constraints of the resources available to them by pushing the boundaries of the legislative structures that have been laid down. In a year when National Care Leavers' Week focuses firmly on delivery (with the theme of 'Stand and Deliver!'), good practice in local authorities and projects across the country, and the positive achievements of care leavers, are at the centre of local and national events and media activity.

National Care Leavers' Week magazine this year features personal stories from care leavers across three decades who have followed their dreams through personal determination. There is also information about new resources, projects, good practice and the week's activities.

For full details and longer versions of some of our articles, visit www.nationalcareleaversweek.org

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Help when you need it

Rachel Burrell is a young filmmaker who has just set up her own company, Instinct Gem Productions, after graduating with a media degree. She is determined to follow her dream

Rachel received a small grant from the Care Leavers' Foundation to help cover some of the equipment she needed to set up in business. However, with or without support, she is the kind of young woman who is determined to follow her dream. It is ten years since Rachel, 28, left care and filmmaking was not her first choice of career.

"I did a GNVQ in Health and Social Care. I wanted to be a social worker at that time, but when I thought seriously about my future I decided what I most wanted to do was travel and see the world," she says.

"I thought of being a travel agent or an air hostess and I continued in education when I left care, gaining a diploma in the travel industry. Soon after I qualified I signed up to be an extra in a BBC drama – and that was it.

"I was hooked. I knew I could really get into the whole thing. It wasn't anything to do with the 'glamour'. I loved seeing how all the roles worked together, from the costume designer to the lighting technician and the producer.

"I took a short course in production and I knew straight away this was what I wanted to do, so I enrolled on a degree course, which I completed earlier this year."

TOUGH COMPETITION

Rachel is finding it hard to break into such a competitive industry. However, she is determined to make a go of it.

"I'm a big believer in following your dream," says Rachel, "I would hate to end up one of those people who doesn't grab the chances when they come along and ends up thinking 'I wonder what would have happened if...'

"I know it isn't going to be easy, but it is the kind of industry where once you get to know people, doors start to open. In the beginning I was just going to do music videos. I know how that works and it's a good commercial area to be in, but I'm interested in making documentaries too.

"I have pitched an idea with a friend for a documentary on homelessness. I do think I have a particular empathy and viewpoint that means I can get inside issues of social deprivation. Growing up in care you see a lot. I've got so many ideas. I want to get into scriptwriting as well."

Rachel took on her first professional assignment outside of the music sector this month when National Care Leavers' Week linked her up with *Children & Young People Now*, which is the backer and brain behind the National Care Leavers' Week web broadcast, *Life After Care*. Picking up this year's theme of service delivery across the regions, *Life After Care* showcases six projects that



It really hit me how much trauma people are carrying when they leave care"

YOUNG FILMMAKER FOLLOWS HER INSTINCTS

have risen to the challenge of delivering care-leaving and after-care services that really make an impact on the lives of young care leavers. Users of the schemes were interviewed as well as practitioners, managers and commissioners.

What did Rachel bring to the film as a care leaver herself? "It enabled me to put a lot of my skills into practice. Interviewing was something I hadn't done before and I enjoyed that. It made me really think because I was touching on areas with

the young people that were very sensitive and I had to be careful how I asked the questions.

"I do think I was able to get the best out of them and help them to relax and open up because of having that shared experience.

"What struck me about the practitioners was how amazingly committed and passionate they were about what they were doing. They were people who loved their jobs and were willing to go the extra mile. It made me think 'I wish I had had

A CARE LEAVER'S TALE... BY SOLOMON GEBREMEDHIN

Hope, hard work, and a belief in self-determination can transform leaving care from an abyss to an opportunity. Having been in care since what seems like the beginning of time, I am at the point where I have to fend for myself – financially, socially and psychologically.

If you have come through the care system, you know what that means. You had a social worker, a personal assistant, a Connexions worker. Now you have none of these. How daunting does that feel?

As a care leaver myself, I can tell you that you are not on your own. The world definitely isn't as scary as you think. You just need to know where to go and who to contact.

I came to the UK as a minor, aged 14. I joined a school in London, then went to college to do a

National Diploma in Applied Sciences before graduating from university with a good degree. Before the end of my academic life, I was well informed that the end of my time was nearing. So, psychologically, I was prepared for that. You may not have been fortunate like me and you may not have prepared yourself, or perhaps you are still on the verge of leaving care. You may have had a good or bad care experience, but you must look ahead because 'what cannot be mended cannot be regretted'. What is clear is that you have a life to lead.

This is what I did. I got myself active. There are mixed feelings on leaving care: happy for no more review meetings, sad that no one seems to care for you. Distraught that you have lots of bills to pay (welcome to the real world), yet you don't have any financial aid. It is natural to worry and feel sorry for yourself.

I subscribed to websites to receive regular newsletters for upcoming jobs, managed to get an internship, contacted friends for advice, and guess what? Over the summer I have been doing coaching that paid me well. I also read; there is so much one can learn by reading and you can never know enough. And I kept a diary, so whenever I got the chance, I scribbled down my emotions. Here is an extract:

“I have read many self help books; I am a self-help junky. Most of them have taught me lessons. A favourite author, Anthony Robbins [he wrote *Unlimited Power* and *Awaken the Giant Within*], says: “Belief can either

make or destroy you.” That is so true. If you truly believe, then you can turn belief into reality.

Recently I met Bob. Full of life, lively, bubbly, Bob has ambition and the urge to become better. Since childhood he had a dream, a huge dream – to be better than the people around him. His family didn't own their house; the government provided it. The little boy lived at the back of a row of council houses. The house was barely big enough for one person, but in it lived the boy's granny, his mother and his sister. Moreover, their house had lots of holes and to stop people peeking in they used clothes or plastic to block these openings.

Life was hard. They asked for a bigger house, but the council refused. “You had to bribe the council,” Bob told me. Yet what could Bob's mother

offer with so little for themselves? She dearly loved her mum and her kids so she barely complained. She got on with life, dreamed and strived.

Meanwhile, Bob mixed with 'posh kids' and he started to have a dream, engulfed by the desire to be better. He noticed the rich kids had different meals every day, attended the best schools, had new sets of clothing and holidays. Bob was smart, not academically, yet he had common sense and grit and the will to learn. He started earning bits of cash. He learned hard work from his mother, who worked in a prestigious hotel. Whenever he visited her at work, he met lots of academics and enjoyed that immensely. He learned to build up

rapport, to improve his communication skills.

Bob is now a successful man who transformed his and his family's life. When I asked him what pulled him through the hard times, he was crystal clear: “I was prepared to work hard and I believed I would do whatever it took to get to wherever I wanted to go in life”.

Bob lives in a third-world country, yet we live in a nation full of abundance. It is down to us to make the most of opportunities that cross our paths. Use the job centre if you need a job, use Google if you need information, use the Citizens Advice Bureau if you want advice, go to college to get qualifications, go to university if you desire to earn a degree. And talk to people if you are stuck with anything. People are your greatest assets. With all this at your disposal, how difficult could leaving care be? Only you can answer that.



someone like you when I left care', but it was good to see, 10 years on, that things are improving.

“I don't think good practice is everywhere though, and I hope people will see this film and be inspired to do more. People from the North can see something good going on in London, people from London can learn from project in Wales, and so on. It will have made it worthwhile if it inspires other teams to fight a bit harder to help care leavers overcome the barriers they face.”

Were there any themes that came out as universal across all the interviews? “There was such a diverse group of people with different experiences and they were all receiving good support compared with a lot of care-leaving services. But housing is still the number one issue. Nearly everyone touched on that. Being in a hostel, waiting a long time for a place, not getting treated as a priority need. So much of the rest of your life depends on having safe and stable housing.

STAND UP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

“Education was another thing. Everyone needs to have someone who will encourage them to find their area of interest and help them follow through and get the skills they need. Not everyone needs to go to university. They need encouragement and support to believe in themselves.

“Mental health also came up a lot. It really hit me how much trauma people are carrying when they leave care. I don't mean people have had total breakdowns, just how many care leavers are living with depression, stress or eating disorders. There is a big stigma around mental health and all workers should have more training in this area, so they can deal with it and provide the support that is needed.

“If there was one message I could give to people coming into this work, it would be to look into it thoroughly and see if it's really for you. You need to be like a parent, always there, staying positive. If one strategy isn't working, try something different. Help them through each dilemma as it comes.

“Be prepared to stand up for young people and make sure they know what their entitlements are. You need to be very caring, understanding and patient. You can't just brand care leavers 'oh, they've got an attitude'. You have to look behind that and see where the attitude is coming from?”

● Watch *Life After Care* daily webcasts, featuring good practice in teams across the UK, throughout National Care Leavers' Week. The five short films, produced by *CYP Now* in association with the Care Leavers' Foundation, focus on housing; mental health; education, employment and training; identity and belonging; and life skills. View at www.lifeaftercare.tv

MAKING SENSE OF MONEY

Linda Jack, youth policy adviser at the Financial Services Authority (FSA), finds the successful management of money is a key factor in young care leavers' practical and emotional wellbeing

A few years ago I visited a young tenants' project to find out what they were doing to support young people in making sense of money and learned that workers ran money management sessions based on their own experience.

Managing money is a key life skill and yet it has been neglected in the past, even though achieving economic wellbeing is one of the *Every Child Matters* outcomes. Some 62% of young people said if they got into money trouble or debt they would not be able to name any advice or support services to which they could turn (Barclays 2005). And 77% are in debt by the age of 21, rising to 85% among the young homeless (Rainer 2007).

Two thirds of young people do not believe they have a good knowledge of finance and a third think debt is not a bad thing (Nationwide 2007).

The FSA has been working through the Financial Capability Strategy to improve the nation's financial capability.

In order to meet the needs of young people who are not in education, employment or training, the FSA recognised that a different approach was needed.

Advised by leading youth organisations, our strategy has been to work through trusted intermediaries, such as youth workers, social workers, Connexions PAs, supported housing staff and

KEY INDICATORS

Someone who is financially capable will be able to:

- Make ends meet
- Keep track of their money
- Plan ahead
- Choose products
- Stay informed about financial matters



Jack: helping young people to manage money

foster carers, who work with our most vulnerable young people.

Together with Fairbridge and Citizens Advice, we developed a one-day training course, Young People and Money. The course aims to equip practitioners to build financial capability into their work with young people and covers the basics of budgeting, banking, credit and debt, underpinned by an understanding of the psychology of young people and money.

Recent independent evaluation of the training found practitioners felt more confident to discuss money matters with the young people with whom they worked and, as a result, these young people felt less stressed about and more in control of their money, were less in debt and were saving more.

Separate research carried out for the FSA demonstrated the positive link between wellbeing and financial capability: a young person who is in control of their money is more likely to be in control of their life and vice versa.

The training is provided free of charge and full details are available at www.yepam.org. If you are already finding new and innovative ways to support young people leaving care to manage their money, we would love to hear from you to help us share good practice across the UK. Together we can contribute to ensuring a brighter future for all young people leaving care.

CLA CALLS FOR YOUNG CARE LEAVERS FROM BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS TO LEAD NEW PROJECT

The Care Leavers' Association (CLA) is calling for young care leavers from black or minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds to steer a new project designed to give them a voice and bring changes to care-leaving services.

The project will be centred around an event that will take place in Manchester early in the new year. It will allow young people to speak about the issues that are important to them and express their opinions about the changes they think should be made. This will be followed by a number of

sessions to discuss how to take the issues forward and a report to the government.

The CLA is seeking young people in care and young care leavers from BME backgrounds to be at the centre of this project, from the planning and events through to the final report.

The commitment will be to attend several steering group meetings at the CLA's Manchester offices. Travel and refreshment expenses will be covered.

If you are between 15 and 25, have spent time in

care, regard yourself as from a BME background and would like to get involved, please contact victoria@careleavers.com or call 0161 236 1980 or visit www.careleavers.com for more details.

ACCESS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

The CLA has set up a petition, led by member Dr Barbara O'Grady, calling for free access to psychological services for care leavers. You can view and sign the petition at <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/CareLeavers/>.

LEAVING CARE: STILL A HARD ROAD TO TRAVEL?

Matthew Huggins is head of a corporate consultancy and author of the book, *I'll Love You If...* Here he recounts his own experience of leaving care

Matthew Huggins, 30, is managing director of Care Matters Partnership, a corporate consultancy providing strategic solutions on parenting issues to local authorities and service providers.

His book *I'll Love You If...* was published earlier this year and documents his journey from childhood to successful entrepreneur via a mental health breakdown. This is what he says:

Leaving care at 16 was the happiest experience of my life. I couldn't wait to leave and nobody tried to stop me. In care I had often felt unloved, unwanted and unlistened to. Leaving care promised an end to those feelings and I looked forward to finally taking control of my life.

My £250 leaving care grant paid the deposit on a small flat. I didn't return to school to sit my GCSEs and I started on a two-year stint working in a fast food outlet.

I had no idea how to make sense of myself as an adult, to handle relationships outside of the care bubble, or to smooth the transition from being a vulnerable, sad and angry boy to a mature, reflective and optimistic man.

Despite learning to talk endlessly about 'how I felt', I was left without the necessary emotional foundation or social skills to build healthy working relationships or friendships in the real world.

There had been little preparation for budgeting, cooking or work; that would have been help-

ful. But what I really needed was emotional support and advice that would have made it easier to understand myself and others.

Seeing 16-year-olds now, it scares me to think how unsafe and alone I was when I took on that first flat. Too young, too fragile and still far too inexperienced in life to have left care. My ambi-

tion and determination to succeed compensated for my lack of qualifications.

At the age of 21 I became the youngest councillor in the country, serving the authority that once cared for me. I quickly made my name on the conference circuit as a 'professional care leaver' and by 23 I was in a senior role managing care provision.

The shaky foundations on which I had built my success came crashing down around me in 2006 when I had a breakdown. I came through that a little older, a little less impulsive and having learned a lot more about my emotional self. After writing

and publishing a book (itself a healing process), I set up Care Matters Partnership and I am now working through conferences and consultation to help build a better care sector.

Leaving care support should be about helping a care leaver to become all they can be – the key is emotional grounding and good mental health. Too much of that is missing for too many care leavers. Not all of them are as lucky as me.



Huggins: working for better care

PRIZE WORD SEARCH

Find 11 care leavers, past and present, from BME backgrounds.

CLUES: You are looking for four champions from the world of sport, two musicians, one rights activist, and four people who are already successful, or plan to be, in arts and media, working as writers or in the broadcast and film industry. (HINT: Two of them are featured in the magazine.)

E-mail your correct answers, with your name and address, to janet.rich@thecareleavesfoundation.org. Six prizewinners will be drawn at the VOICE event on 30 October.

R	J	K	N	A	B	U	E	S	I	R	H	C	N	O	G
S	O	L	G	E	B	R	E	M	E	D	H	I	N	S	U
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TOGETHER WE CAN DO IT BETTER

Can a Public Service Agreement (PSA) join up government departments to make a difference in improving access to settled accommodation, education, employment or training? An interview with **Ann Watt**, deputy director of the Social Exclusion Task Force in the Cabinet Office

What real gains have there been for care leavers since PSA16 was published in October 2007?

The impact I see for care leavers covers three areas. The development and launch of Care2Work – linking young people to training, mentoring and employment – is a great example of the government taking on its corporate parenting role and giving young people in care the same opportunities as other young people.

We have been particularly pleased by the range of employers who have come into the scheme – Wickes, English Heritage, Marks and Spencer, Tesco – big names offering big opportunities. 120 authorities have signed up so far. The companies are putting their time and resources into the scheme but there is potential for companies and communities, as well as individual care leavers, to reap real benefits over time. The commitment employers have given is a long-term one. In that sense, the scheme is recession proof.

People are aware of the huge disadvantages care leavers are facing. Yes, there is growing overall youth unemployment, but there is no question of the schemes being reduced. It is a relatively small group with significant returns. We know a lot of care leavers have potential to do well, but competition for jobs and barriers to entry are high for a group that has often missed out on a lot of the conventional opportunities.

How many care leavers will benefit from Care2Work?

We don't have those figures, but the numbers are significant. Credit for picking this up and really selling it lies with NCAS; they have really run with it. This time last year it was still just an idea, then it developed into an announcement in the New Opportunities white paper.

There has been strong backing from Number 10

too and we have really pushed this programme through the SE Task Force.

What else are you doing to help more care leavers into education, employment or training?

The performance management programme around EET outcomes (numbers of young people in education, employment or training) will have a big impact on care leavers.

We have been trying to answer questions about why performance is so different across local areas; how can we share best practice to pull up weaker performers?

Information was gathered from professionals working with care leavers and care leavers themselves looking at what makes the difference, what the barriers are and how working across different agencies could deliver improvements.

What were your findings?

The report won't be published until the end of the year, but I can give you an indication of its content. Young people said they weren't that clear about what kind of help was available to them in terms of improving their situation or what steps they needed to take to get onto a training course or take a longer term view of where they needed to be heading.

From the professional's perspective, they realised that just being supportive, asking young people how they were getting on at college, in the same way as a parent would, made a big difference.

The benefit of having virtual heads was starting to have an impact too, particularly where they keep their virtual responsibility for care leavers up to 21. The point of the report is to spread best practice and there will also be specific work with the 30 weakest performing areas.

These are relatively easy wins; there are no big resource implications. Things can change just by

Life After Care Web video broadcast

Each day of National Care Leavers' Week a short film will be webcast showcasing the views of care leavers and good practice from leaving care projects in Camden, Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, Stockport, Nottingham and Torfaen. Log on to www.lifeaftercare.tv to view the following features:

Monday 26th Housing

Tuesday 27th Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing

Wednesday 28th Life Skills

Thursday 29th Education Training and Employment

Friday 30th Who am I? Identity and Belonging

Advocacy and campaigning charity Voice will be launching daily policy briefings on related topics throughout the week. Visit www.voiceyp.org

saying let's really prioritise EET outcomes and not just assume these young people can't achieve.

What about housing?

The work we've been doing on accommodation has a delivery plan across all four PSA target groups – Care Leavers, adults on probation, mental health service users and adults with a learning disability.

Government offices in the regions and CLG (community and local government) partnerships have been leading on the accommodation strand of this work, because it goes beyond the boundaries of care leaving teams and impacts on all the PSA16 groups.

Do you have evidence that the PSA16 work will make a difference?

Progress is hard to determine at this stage. Autumn figures are expected to show an increase in the number of young people not in education, employment or training due to the recession, masking any improvements driven by PSA16.

It feels like a great effort has been made to address some key issues. A Public Service Agreement target brings a lot of leverage to get colleagues in the Cabinet Office and Department for Work and Pensions behind this. The Department for Children, Schools and Families and NCAS will follow up with delivery. The important thing is that we keep stretching the bounds of what's possible and not be complacent.

For instance, I am particularly pleased with the progress on Care2Work. We didn't initially anticipate it being rolled out in every local authority, so this is a big plus, but we need to be careful the schemes don't just pick off the 'easier' people and care leavers who face bigger issues are also given a fair chance.

LONGING FOR BELONGING

The experience of **Delma Hughes** makes a powerful case for improving support for siblings in care

One of seven siblings, artist and therapist Delma Hughes was 'in care' from the age of 18 months to 18 years. Although the legal status remained until the age of 18, girls left the home where Hughes lived at 16. "The teacher wanted me to stay on, but children from the home didn't go to college," says Hughes. "It was either the sewing factory or the sticky fly-paper factory on the other side of town."

It's fair to say things have moved on since Hughes left care in 1975. "It was a loveless upbringing. I lived in every form of children's home, foster care and secure accommodation. When I was 16, I had a foster mum I really liked. She gave me respect. She was a divorcee, which carried huge stigma then, and social services refused to let her have a foster child, but they let her have me!

"What I most lacked was any sense of belonging. Just this person cut adrift, no idea who I was or where I fitted in; that had a profound impact on me. Art was always my safe haven. I can't remember a time when I didn't draw, or sit among the Welsh slate carving objects. Twenty years after leaving care I got hold of my file and discovered I had five sisters and a brother. I have very few memories of childhood.

"Apparently I was with my sister Iris in a Salvation Army home. Then she got a family that wanted her. She was the pretty one. I stopped eating for quite a while at the age of six until they brought her back. But we were soon separated again.

RENEWING FAMILY TIES

"I tracked each sister down. Meeting them helped. Just seeing other people that looked like me gave me some sense that I had come from somewhere. One died shortly after. Three of them had been abused in care. Their lives were messy. We are good friends now but working towards creating a real bond is a challenge. When early bonding is taken away and severed there is nothing to get back. You can't renew what isn't there. We have no history together, no shared memories. That matters a lot in families."

Hughes spent the first decade of her adult life as a working artist, before training as an art therapist. "I didn't stick the factory long. I worked on a farm, a hotel. Every job had to be live in because I had no accommodation. I ended up in a Cheshire



Hughes: righting wrongs of sibling separation

home looking after people with disabilities. I was running art groups for these amazing people who painted using their toes, their mouths, producing fantastic work. They told me I must go to art college and helped me complete the forms and build up a portfolio. That was the first time anyone had taken an interest in me. I was 21 when I started my fine arts degree. Every penny of my education was paid for through part-time jobs and saving.

"Even at university I was an outsider. It was frowned on for women to do fine art, particularly sculpture, which was my passion. Someone reported me for not paying my fees in my final year and I was told to leave. A tutor arranged a shed for me to work in around the back of the buildings. I managed to get together enough work for my

exhibition for finals and they had to give me my degree. I received a 2/1.

"I loved my art. It was my only way of communicating. It was a bridge between me and the rest of the world. I decided to train as an art therapist when I realised what a powerful communication tool this was for children who had also experienced trauma, separation and loss.

"After 16 years in practice, I was frustrated at the number of children I was seeing who had issues around siblings. Siblings they didn't see or had never known. Or where there was 'contact', it was of the motorway service station variety. Little planning, no quality and scant attention to the need to deal with the emotional aftermath."

CHANGING ATTITUDES

After extensive research and a determination to start a sea change in attitudes to sibling separation, Hughes ran her first experimental sibling camp in 2008. The second pilot, this summer, cemented her belief that this area of work must be given greater priority if children in care are not to experience the kind of separation and numbing that blighted her own life for so many years.

She firmly believes sibling relationships are every bit as important as parental ones. "You try out all your strategies for relating to others with siblings. Fights, squabbles, negotiations, celebrations. How are you to learn growing up when you don't have these relationships around you?"

Hughes has touched on areas that shame the care system in the UK, despite all the improvements in recent decades, and her concerns about siblings in care have been taken up by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Her professional legacy may well be a revolution in the way sibling relationships are supported. However, her real achievement is as a mother of two sons, now aged 16 and 21, and a real credit to her. "I had no role model for bringing up children. I had no experience of families. So I visited the library every day and read books on parenting, birthing, breastfeeding. I read everything I could and then took the plunge."

Cycles of care don't have to be repeated. While there are still real battles to be fought to improve aspects of the system, at least we don't send our care leavers to work in factories any more.



I loved my art. It was a bridge between me and the rest of the world"

LEARNING AND RESOURCES

Find out more about local, national and global good practice in leaving care

ROUGH GUIDE TO LEAVING RESIDENTIAL CARE

The National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care's (NCERCC) *Rough Guide to Leaving Residential Care* is a new resource for residential workers and managers, highlighting some of the particular difficulties faced by children moving on from residential settings.

It includes sections on surviving on a low budget, healthy and frugal eating, and an A to Z of barriers faced by young people leaving care.

The guide is not a comprehensive manual for leaving care and complements the excellent *Get Ready for Adult Life* materials produced by the What Makes the Difference Project, offering a specific perspective for residential child care practitioners. It includes exercises and discussion topics and aims to reinforce and develop existing good practice. It also invites reflection on how young people can best make the transition from the highly protected and regulated world of residential care to the far less certain world of independent living.

A section on theoretical and research perspectives is included. However, the guide is first and foremost practical, and encourages residential care workers to break down barriers rather than be defeated by them.

The invitation from NCERCC is for readers to contribute to the *Rough Guide* by providing feedback on its usefulness and their own best practice, as well as case studies of good and bad practice by placing authorities in relation to how they plan moving on from residential care, and whether such plans move at the child's preferred pace.

www.ncb.org/ncercc

SETTING UP: A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Setting Up: A Place to Call Home is a report from the Care Leavers' Foundation that assesses variance across the country in the leaving care grants available to young people leaving care to set up their first home.

While presenting a gloomy picture in some areas, the report provides a useful benchmark for authorities wishing to compare themselves with other areas, and provides a realistic up-to-date analysis of the cost of setting up a first home.

www.thecareleaversfoundation.org

JOURNEYS TO HOME

Journeys to Home: Care Leavers Successful Transition to Independent Accommodation is a good practice guide to support local authorities and their partners to improve accommodation outcomes for young people in and from care. It is a free resource produced as part of the Department for Children, Schools and Families-funded NCAS accommodation project. Young people leaving care often have a range of very different experiences, and this impacts on how they set up a new home and achieve their independence. *Journeys to Home* identifies the steps to providing suitable accommodation at each stage of a young person's journey.

Through identifying specific issues for care leavers, recommendations, practice examples and good practice case studies, the guide identifies how local authorities and others who support young people can improve their housing prospects. Actions to be taken are helpfully colour-categorised as *strategic*, *operational* and *personal*, so those using it can immediately identify what is their responsibility.

The guide is accompanied by a work planning tool to support local authorities and their partners in putting its recommendations into action.

The accompanying magazine, *Home Truths*, produced for and by young care leavers, uses real-life stories, quizzes, a problem page and articles to inform young people of accommodation options and the implications of living independently.

LEAVING CARE: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The inaugural National Care Leavers' Week Lecture will take place during the week, sponsored by NCAS and delivered this year by Professor Mike Stein with the support of Veronique Lerch and

DIARY DATES

Wednesday, 21 October to Friday, 30 October

Voice Exhibition, Home from Home
5 Star Gallery, Storey's Gate, London

Monday to Friday, 26-30 October

Life After Care
Daily webcasts featuring good practice

Tuesday, 27 October

Conference: Stand and Deliver!

Thursday, 29 October

NCAS National Care Leavers' Week Lecture
Leaving Care: International Perspectives

Friday, 30 October

Voice Exhibition, Home from Home
A creative celebration of care leavers

Saturday 31 October

Care Leavers' Foundation
Launch of 10th Anniversary fundraising campaign

Full details at www.nationalcareleaversweek.org

young people from SOS Children's Villages International. The lecture will explore three questions: What is corporate parenting? What are the challenges for corporate parenting, arising from international research? What are the policy and practice messages from research?

The first question will look at corporate parenting from different perspectives, including young people and those responsible for providing corporate parenting. The second question will draw on international studies and identify the key issues faced in acting as corporate parents, including whether services should be provided as a 'duty' or be 'permissive', whether they should be focused on care leavers or all young people, and whether they should be accessed as a right or be conditional. The third question will look at what contributes to promoting the resilience of young care leavers at the time they are living in care, when they are leaving care and after they leave care.

Thanks to the following organisations for continuing to make National Care Leavers' Week possible – Voice, NCAS, ANV, CLA – and to our sponsors:

